Conscience Formation in Catholic Education
Sacred Heart Mercy Conference
Alma, Michigan
June 6, 2012

(June 1, 2012)
Draft

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Introduction: Focus, Goal, and Resources

This presentation offers suggestions for ways pastors and teachers can participate in conscience formation in the *public areas* of the classroom, hall ways, athletics fields in Catholic educational institutions such as elementary and secondary schools, universities, and seminaries. While some of the principles are similar to those found in the private contexts of confession, spiritual direction, and counseling, specific practical approaches are often very different.

In the past month on May 5th, 2012, Pope Benedict addressed the Bishops of Region XIII of the United States on their *ad limina* saying: "I have been reflecting … on the intellectual and cultural challenges of the new evangelization in the context of contemporary American society. In the present talk, I wish to address the question of religious education and the faith formation of the next generation of Catholics… . "America's Catholic elementary and high schools… remain an essential resource for the *new evangelization*."[1]

One week later, on May 12, 2012, Cardinal Timothy Dolan gave the Commencement Address at the Catholic University of America. He referred back to Pope Benedict's address: "Just six days ago, Pope Benedict XVI, in addressing bishops from Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Wyoming, spoke warmly of Catholic Education

[1] Pope Benedict XVI, "To the States, The 'Professor-Pope' Talks Education," (May 5, 2012), Complete text available at http://Whispersintheloggia.blogspot.com. [Accessed 5/15/2-12], pars. 1-2.

here in the United States, and of the need of our Catholic colleges and universities 'to reaffirm their distinctive identity in fidelity to their founding ideals and the Church's mission in service to the Gospel."[2]

Continuing with his own personal reflections, Cardinal Dolan offered a series of rhetorical questions, two of which are pertinent to our discussion. They describe both the proper goal of Catholic higher education and criteria by which to evaluate a university's success in helping students to reach this goal: "That a university's genuine greatness comes not from pursuing what is most chic, recent, or faddish, but what it most timeless, true, good, and beautiful in creation and creatures? That *the true goal of a university is to prepare a student not only for a career but for fullness of life here and in eternity*?"[3]

Preparing a student for the goal of eternal life in union with God and the communion of saints involves much more than just imparting intellectual information and academic skills: As Pope Benedict said in his *ad limina*, "First, as we know, the essential task of authentic education at every level is not simply that of passing on knowledge, essential as this is, but also of *shaping hearts*."[4] The heart is often referred to as the seat of one's conscience and/or will. Cardinal Stafford, in 1995, when he was Archbishop of Denver, wrote a three-part Pastoral Letter (1995) to the people of Northern Colorado on Catholic Education. He reflected on the relation of heart to education: "*To memorize 'by heart'* is a beautiful phrase and an equally beautiful reality. Throughout the ages, it has always had a special place in the handing on of our Christian faith."[5] He summed up the

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[2] Cardinal Timothy Dolan, "At 'The Heart of our Nation and Church,' The President Talks 'the Law of the Gift'", (May 12, 2012). Text available at http://whispersintheloggia.blogspot.com/, [accessed 5/15/2012], par.6.
[3] Dolan, "At the Heart," par. 8.
[4] Pope Benedict, "To the States," par. 6.
[5] J. Francis Stafford, *In the Beginning the Word,* Part One: Sign of the Times (March 25, 1995); Part Two: Living Stones (May 25, 1995); and Part Three: The Way of the Pilgrim (August 15, 1995), II.15, p. 8.

particular challenge for educators and pastors in Catholic schools to open and help form the hearts of their students in the public arenas of schools and universities:

> *Real learning depends on a classroom atmosphere of shared basic principles and purpose-filled harmony*. We should remember that we live in an age of information overload. We are drowning in too many data and too little coherence. The task of the Catholic school is to restore a sense of organic wholeness to knowledge; to instill a sense of wonder before the beauty, truth and goodness of created reality. We must demonstrate that the broken fragments of our world fit together in a deeper fabric of meaning. We must reassert that beauty, truth and goodness exist; that God is their source; and that in Him, as His child, the human person possesses a surpassing nobility that is more than the sum of our genes or atoms.[6]

Educating about conscience implies educating the whole person, and not just one aspect of the person.

Education in a Catholic School should also provide an experience of real communion. As Sr. Rita Rae Schneider, RSM explains in her essay "The Concept of Communion: Central to the identity and educative mission of the catholic school:" "The Church's concept of herself as a communion provides the logical starting point and context necessary for understanding the Catholic school as a community and its importance as a 'genuine and proper instrument of the Church in her mission of evangelization."[7]

For purposes of analysis, this presentation will be divided into the following three sections always keeping in mind the whole person in relation to the community in the school:

Firstly, Bringing the Mind in Conformity with the Truth;
Secondly, Making the Best Choice in One's Acts ;
Thirdly, Learning to Evaluate of Past Acts with an Eye to the Future.

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[6] Stafford, *In the Beginning*, II.24, p. 8.
[7] M. R.R. Schneider, R.S.M., "The Concept of communion. Central to the identity and educative mission of the catholic school," referring back to Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School,* (7 April, 1988), par. 3., in *Seminarium,* XLVII (2007), par. 4).

Each section will begin with a description of the theoretical principles associated with the theme. Then, examples offered by *teachers, principals, and pastors with experience* of different levels of education are provided to give some descriptions of ordinary ways to form the consciences of their students in the public areas of education.

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Primary Sources for this presentation are drawn from magisterial documents in which the word 'conscience' is directly applied to education:

1965 *Gravissimum educationis* (Declaration on Christian Education of the Second Vatican Council), October 28, 1965. [GE]
1965 *Gaudium et spes*, (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World of the Second Vatican Council, December 7, 1965. [GS]
1965 *Dignitatis humanae* (Declaration on Religious Freedom), December 7, 1965. [DH]
1977 *The Catholic School*, Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education [CS]
1982 *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witness to Faith*, Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education LCS]
1983 *Educational Guidance in Human Love*, Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education [EG]
1988 *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, Congregation for Catholic Education (April 7, 1988).
1990 *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (On Catholic Universities) [ECC]
1995 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], "The Formation of Conscience", nos. 1776-1802, especially 1784-1785.
1995 *In the Beginning the Word*, Three-part Pastoral Letter on Catholic Education by J. Francis Stafford, Archbishop of Denver [BW]
1997 *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, Congregation for Catholic Education (of Seminaries and Educational Institutions) [CST]
2002 *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools*, Congregation for Catholic Education [CP]
2005 *Program of Priestly Formation* (fifth edition), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [PPF]
2007 *Educating together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission Between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful*, Congregation for Catholic Education (of Seminaries and Educational Institutions), September 8, 2007) [ET]

Various *secondary sources* on either education or conscience were also consulted and they are included in the relevant footnotes. Some of these are in your packets of

registration. During our discussion following I invite you to introduce examples from your own experience.

Bringing the Mind in Conformity with the Truth

It is a well known Thomistic principle that the human will follows the directions that the mind proposes to it. Consequently, the first step that teachers or pastors need to take in the broader area of conscience formation is to help children and adults conform their mind to the truth, so that they can choose the best means to act according to what they perceive as the true good. This first principle is beautifully described in the Second Vatican Council Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae* 1965). In the very first paragraph of this document drafted in part by Karol Wojtyla before he became Pope John Paul II, we read:

> On their part, all men are bound to seek the truth, especially in what concerns God and His Church, and to embrace the truth they come to know, and to hold fast to it.
>
> This Vatican Council likewise professes its belief that it is upon the human conscience that these obligations fall and exert their binding force. The truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power.[8]

Important concepts in this very significant passage include, but are not limited to: the obligation of each person's to use their conscience to seek truth, to embrace truth, and to hold fast to truth. Furthermore, this obligation discovered in the conscience has a binding force on the person.

The essential link between these obligations and Catholic education is stated in the Second Vatican Council Declaration on *The Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et spes*, 1985), also drafted in part by Karol Wojtyla:

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[8] *Dignitatis Humanae* (Promulgated by his Holiness Pope Paul VI, December 7, 1965), par. 1.

> In order for individual men to discharge with greater exactness the obligations of their conscience towards themselves and the various group to which they belong, they must be carefully educated to a higher degree of culture through the use of the immense resources available today to the human race. Above all the education of youth from every social background has to be undertaken, so that there can be produced not only men and women of refined talents, but those great-souled persons who are so desperately required by our times.[9]

In other words, in order to meet the obligations to see, embrace, and hold fast to one's conscience, formation or education of conscience must be given well and often.

Another classical Thomist principle claims that where there is an obligation, there must be a corresponding right, and vice-versa, if there is a right there must be a corresponding obligation or duty. Thus, it is not surprising to discover two rights flowing from the obligation to receive education or formation of one's conscience. In the Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, also promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1965, we discover the first section subtitled "The Meaning of the Universal Right to an Education" and the eight section describing the relation of Catholic schools and conscience:

> … [T]his sacred synod proclaims anew what has already been taught in several documents of the magisterium, namely: the right of the Church freely to establish and to conduct schools of every type and level. And the council calls to mind that the exercise of a right of this kind contributes in the highest degree to the protection of freedom of conscience, the rights of parents, as well as to the betterment of culture itself.[10]

The right to learn the truth in a particular manner was also described in the initial passage quoted from the *Declaration of Religious Freedom.* Let us recall its words: "The truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into

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[9] *Gaudium et Spes* (Promulgated by his Holiness Pope Paul VI, December 7, 1965), par. 31.
[10] *Gravissimum Educationis* (Proclaimed by Pope Paul VI, October 28, 1965), par. 8. See this theme developed with respect to the right of parents to freely select schools for their children according to the principal of subsidiarity and in accordance with their conscience in Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (December 28, 1997, par. 17.

the mind at once quietly and with power." A frequent way to paraphrase this passage is: 'Truth persuades by its own gentle power'.

Our present Pope Benedict XVI is often thought of as 'the gentle Pope' because of the way he communicates truth. In his recent address to our Bishops of Region XIII, the Holy Father repeated the right to an education along with an appeal to how we ought to teach. In his words:

> It is no exaggeration to say that providing young people with a sound education in the faith represents the most urgent internal challenge facing the Catholic community in your country. The deposit of faith is a priceless treasure which each generation must pass on to the next by winning hearts to Jesus Christ and shaping minds in the knowledge, understanding and love of his Church. It is gratifying to realize that, in our day too, the Christian vision, presented in its breadth and integrity, proves immensely appealing to the imagination, idealism and aspirations of the young, who have a *right* to encounter the faith in all its beauty, its intellectual richness and its radical demands.[11]

The next part of this first section, we will turn from the theoretical description of principles about rights, obligations, and the link between conscience and education, to offer two practical examples of how educators have done or are doing this.

Example: An Archbishop's Pastoral Letter on Catholic Education

The first important act of a person forming others in the exercise of their conscience is to communicate objective truths, known by faith and by reason. Depending upon whether the person is a Bishop, Pastor, administrator, or teacher of theology, philosophy, mathematics, or catechesis, or elementary school, knowing the truths and methods used to reach these truths are important for helping others conform their minds to truth.

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[11] Pope Benedict, "To the States," par. 4, pp. 21-22.

In a 1995 three-part pastoral letter "To the People of God of Northern Colorado on Catholic Education", then Archbishop J. Francis Stafford identified what needs to be taught: "Virtues are rooted in objective truths about human nature, and truth makes demands. Truth requires us to have a conscience." (I. 19). He identified six "governing principles of Catholic education":

> First, truth exists, it has been revealed by God, and men and women can discover and understand it.
> Second, truth is not an idea or an abstraction, but a person, Jesus Christ.
> Third, we encounter the truth, Jesus Christ, most fully in the Catholic Church.
> Fourth, we must share the truth with the world.
> Fifth, this sharing must proceed from a critical reflection on, and must involve a challenging dialogue with, the surrounding public culture.
> Sixth, we begin that task of evangelizing, or sharing the truth, in the home. Thus, parents are the primary educators of their children and the most important educational resource in any secular or faith community.[12]

While serving as the Archbishop of Denver, Cardinal Stafford set up a Catechetical School based on the four pillars of the newly released *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It became a requirement for certification of every teacher of every subject in every Catholic school to take a 24 hour course on the four pillars of the *Catechism*. Six hour courses were offered for each of the pillars throughout the Archdiocese at many different locations and times of year. Teachers were given a generous amount of time to complete the four pillars. In this way the truth of the faith "could make its entrance in the mind at once quietly and with power." Seventeen years later this flourishing Catechetical School is still a requirement for all Catholic teachers.

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[12] Stafford, *In the Beginning the Word*, I. 25.

Example: A Priest Director of the Spirituality Year at a Seminary

In a second example, some practical principles are offered to new seminarians who come for a "Spirituality Year" before moving into the study of Philosophy or Theology. Father Jim Thermos, at St. John Vianney Theological Seminary in Denver provides a list of his expectations for the men who arrive at the seminary from all walks of life to begin a year of discernment for the diocesan priesthood. By stating at the outset, the principles he will use for their evaluation throughout the year, Father speaks the truth from his perspective of what it means to be a Christian man, modeled on St. Joseph; and he tells the men that when he meets with them he will ask them to assess how they are doing with respect to these principles:

St. Joseph, Teach me to be a man …

To take responsibility for my life -
To choose freely
To admit what choices I've made
To refrain from seeing myself as a victim
To admit my mistakes
To take initiative
To resolve to work hard at the tasks I have put my hand to
To ask how I can make the current situation better.

To accept everything in Jesus' name -
With optimism - trusting in the Providence of God
With gratitude- knowing everything is a gift
With the knowledge that the world is imperfect - and treat it so
Without complaining

To always be a gentlemen-
Gracious, hospital and generous
Radiating a smile that communicates to the world that Christ is Risen
Up building in my speech - avoiding sarcasm and harmful humor
Always assuming that my neighbor has good will and good motives
Refraining from emotional outbursts and being easily agitated

To ask the questions that a man asks -
"Who is the most vulnerable right now or the most in need?"
"How can I act with kindness and Christian charity?"
"What can I do for others?" instead of "What can others do for me?"
"What is the job no one wants to do right now?"
And step up and do that job - with a smile-leading by example.
"Who is leading right now? What can I do to assist them?"

To be a man of prayer -
Through Jesus, with Jesus and in Jesus.
As a beloved son of the Father
Docile to the indwelling and promptings of the Holy Spirit
In the care of Mary, our Mother -with the communion of saints.

To summarize: the first kind of truths offered by Cardinal Stafford and the subsequent study of the four pillars of the catechism are called 'theoretical' because they make a claim or statement about the Catholic Faith, the Creed, the Sacraments, the Moral Life, and Prayer. The second kind of truths offered by Father Thermos in the context of forming men in a spirituality year are called 'practical' because they ask for a particular response--- some by describing a kind of good action, others by asking a rhetorical question. The response of a well-formed conscience to the first kind of statements is: "Yes, I believe.' The response of a well formed conscience to the second kind of statements is: "Yes. I choose to act this way."

Making the Best Choice in One's Acts

To begin this second section, let us return to the Second Vatican Council's *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.* The theme of conscience echoes profoundly in its orientation towards moral life:

> In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. For a man has in his heart a law written

> by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths. In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor. In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of men in the search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals from social relationships. Hence the more right conscience holds sway, the more persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and strive to be guided by the objective norms of morality.[13]

In this very rich paragraph extracted from the larger discussion of human dignity in *Gaudium et spes,* conscience is described in several different ways: as a law we discover and which seems to call us or bind us with an 'ought' to act or not to act in a particular way; as a way of being joined with others in the search for truth; and as offering positive solutions to problems which are based on objective and firm moral norms.

In a recent article entitled, "Conscience: The Crisis of Authority," Bishop Anthony Fisher, OP, of the Diocese of Parramatta, Australia, emphasized that conscience is not an external "voice that intrudes into an ordinary reasoning process but rather is discovered in and through our reasoning." [14] Bishop Fisher wants to give practical reasoning its true authority and to strengthen the confidence of ordinary men and women, boys and girls, that they have the ability to discover the good act that they ought to do and then act responsibility on this discovery:

> The classical account of conscience begins by reflecting upon the universal experience of agency. I *can* choose and I *can* reflect upon past choices. In doing so I can judge present possibilities and past choices rationally. I have a sense of responsibility, of accountability, of self-possession in my present and future decision-making and in reflection upon my past decisions and actions. This human capacity to know and choose the good and this human activity of thinking practically is 'conscience.'"[15]

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[13] *Gaudium et spes*, 16.
[14] Anthony Fisher, "Conscience: The Crisis of Authority," in Fisher, *Catholic Bioethics for a New Millennium* (Cambridge: University Press, 2012), chapter 2, 39.
[15] Fisher, "Conscience," 42-43.

One of the greatest needs for those forming others in the exercise of their conscience is to teach what the conscience really is and how it operates within the person.[16] Drawing upon the work of Thomas Aquinas and Pope John Paul II, the correct understanding states that conscience is an act, or practical judgment of our intellect, about the moral quality of an act we are doing now, have done, or are considering to do in the future.[17] Using a kind of homey metaphor, we could say that our conscience is like a kind of motion sensor light within us, that only goes on when motion occurs in front of it. The motion has to be a particular act whose moral quality we are thinking about after we have done it, while we are doing it, or if we are considering doing it in the future. It is a very dynamic particular reality, an incredible gift to the human person. It mediates between us and the objective truth about what is really the good thing do to and the evil thing to avoid.

In a Pastoral Letter, to the people of the Diocese of Fargo, North Dakota, *You will Know the Truth and the Truth Will Set You Free,* Bishop Samuel Aquila addressed "five areas of confusion in the hearts and minds of some of the faithful, in the hope that as a Catholic people we will come to a deeper understanding of the truth that sets us free."[18] Conscience always concerns the means that we choose to achieve an end, our true good which is union with God and the objectively true good. As the Second Vatican Council *Declaration on Religious Freedom* summarizes it: "…man perceives and acknowledges the imperatives of the divine law through the mediation of his conscience. In all his

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[16] See Sr. Prudence Allen, R.S.M., "Where is Our Conscience? Aquinas and Modern and Contemporary Philosophers," *International Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 44, no. 3 (September 2004): 335-372.
[17] See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, trans, US Catholic Conference (New York: Image Doubleday, 1995), #1778.
[18] Samuel J. Aquila, *You will Know the Truth and the Truth Will Set You Free, A Pastoral Letter on Deepening our Understanding of the Truths of the Catholic Faith*, (November 30, 2004), par. 4.

activity a man is bound to follow his conscience in order that he may come to God, the end and purpose of life."[19]

It is possible for teachers and pastors to help others discover the dynamic reality of their conscience when we teach or form others in a public situation like a school, seminary, or parish. When you think if it, teachers have the opportunity to meet with the same person 30, 40, 50, up to 200 times a year in their classroom. In 1977 the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education in *The Catholic School* described the obligation of those who work in Catholic schools in today's society: "It must develop persons who are responsible and inner-directed, capable of choosing freely in conformity with their conscience."[20] Even more, this document addresses the *obligation for forming conscience* among all those who work in Catholic schools: "The cooperation required for the realization of this aim is a duty in conscience for all the members of community teachers, parents, pupils, administrative personnel. Each has his or her own part to play."[21]

By 1995, the publication of a section on 'The Formation of Conscience' in the *Catechism of the Catholic Schools* provides a long-term map for many different dimensions involved in the formation of conscience:

> The education of the conscience is a lifelong task. From the earliest years, it awakens the child to the knowledge and practice of the interior law recognized by conscience. Prudent education teaches virtue; it prevents or cures fear, selfishness and pride, resentment arising from guilt, and feelings of complacency, born of human weakness and faults. The education of the conscience guarantees freedom and engenders peace of heart.[22]

To sum up, formation of conscience in Catholic schools or universities aims to help the student exercise his or her practical intellect towards virtuous acts, respecting always the

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[19] *Dignitatis Humanae,* par. 3.
[20] The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (1977), par. 31.
[21] *The Catholic School.* par. 61.
[22] *The Catechism of the Catholic Church,* #1784.

interior freedom of the student, and leading the student to self-discovery of interior conscience and through it objective moral laws. This formation in conscience is a 'lifelong task.

The claim that children have a *right* to have their consciences formed, to have teachers to work directly for this end is important to consider. In a 1983 document from the Congregation for Catholic Education, on the theme of *Educational Guidance in Human Love,* we read: "In defense of the rights of the child in this area, John Paul II *stimulates* the consciences of all responsible Christians, especially parents and operators of the instruments of social communication, so that they do not hide behind the pretext of neutrality and respect for the spontaneous development of the child, since in reality this is behaviour of preoccupying indifference."[23] So the Holy Father stimulates our consciences as teachers or pastors so that we will stimulate the consciences of our students or parishioners. Students have the right to expect that we will do just this in our appropriate realm of professional and vocational responsibility.

At this point, I would like to introduce two illustrations of how teachers may provide an educational environment which encourages the exercise of conscience to choose good means to a good end. One example is in music and the other in philosophy.

Example: A Catholic School Music Band Teacher of Grades 5-8

Sr. Mary Andrea Lesko, RSM teaches music at St. Clare's Catholic School in Edwards, Colorado. In a term paper she wrote for a Masters Course in Philosophy of

[23] Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educational Guidance in Human Love, Outlines for Sex Education* (November 1, 1983), par. 68. A footnote to this paragraph cites John Paul II, Message for the XIII World Communications Day, 23rd May (1979) AAS 71 (1979-II), pp. 930-933.

Music Education (Fall 2006), Sister describes her thinking about how playing together in a school band can build a community among the students based on the common good:

> …[T]he music class room allows for a controlled setting where students may face, individually and directly, their true talents, shortcomings, faults, failings, epiphanies in an environment that rewards excellence not with stickers, but with true harmonic union, motivated not by a letter grade or acceptance into a group, but by responsibility to the wellbeing of the group, and encourages virtues such as humility and patience as students help and receive help from other students….
>
> On a deeper level, there is something uniquely profound in the performance of a musical ensemble. What happens to a musician in moments of ensemble performance is indescribable. It is itself a model of the Holy Trinity: one receives the gift of musical ability, gives obedience to the truth of the music, and from this intimate cycle of giving and receiving music is born setting fire to the hearts that are open to receiving it. Also it makes both visible and aesthetically sensible the great wonder that occurs when many different voices [or instruments] unite for one sound… The ensemble is a model of the full communion we all seek not only in the obvious sense of many people coming together to create one sound, but more profoundly in every individual's experience with the music itself. Therefore, as educators it is imperative that we give students the fundamental ability to interpret and create expression in music - to be obedient to what the music genuinely is. In the truth of the music, a musician [could] find the true nature of his soul.[24]

How does a teacher encourage and, practically speaking, move students towards these very high goals? Sister Mary Andrea offers several examples. As anyone who has heard children begin to play musical instruments knows, there are often many wrong notes and erroneous timing mixed in with the right ones. In a practice, she does not say to a student, "X you played the wrong note!" Instead, she will say something like "Trumpet section, make sure you are playing B flats, not B naturals!" This way the students correct themselves in order to be a stronger member of the group of trumpets. The one playing the wrong note may think: "I'm standing in the way of achieving the goal of our group, so I want to change and get that note right."

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[24] Sr. Mary Andrea Lesko, RSM, unpublished paper, Philosophy of Music Education (Fall 2006), available at (her email?).

What is important is that students never feel that they are being forced repeatedly to look at what they are doing wrong without being upheld in what they are doing right (understanding that a fifth grade level "good" is not the same as an eight grade 'good.'). Also Sister Mary Andrea emphasizes that what is very important to this environment is the cohesiveness of the group itself. When the ~~imporants~~ importance of the parts to the whole for the good of all is reinforced by the teacher, the students seek the success of each other, not only of themselves.

In another example, Sister said that she encourages the students to think of themselves as part of a religious family. In the higher 8th grade band she will talk about the freedom to be who you really are. She will say something like: 'Saxophones, we need you to play the notes and rhythms written for you! Be careful not to follow the trumpets in what they are playing!" or vice-versa. Each student musician needs to know where he or she belongs, and have confidence that together they belong to the family of St. Clare School's 8th grade band. All desire the family to move forward; and so they want to work for the common goal of all moving forward together in harmony.

At St. Clare's School there is a Christmas pageant and a spring concert in which every child in the school participates from kindergarten through eighth grade, each according to his or her ability and all for the common good. In just two years the parents say that 'Sister Mary Andrea has worked miracles with the bands of 5th -8th grade students'. Just last week the 4th grade students eagerly came to choose out their instruments for the coming year. During last fall, when the older boys started a football team, students, teachers, and parents spontaneously organized a pep band and then the 3rd graders organized themselves into cheerleaders. A person from the outside could feel

the joy of being part of this musical support for the football team and the school. Another parent brought pizza for everyone after the games.

In Sister Mary Andrea's paper, she brought out the importance of a catholic school awakening communion through the transcendentals, especially the transcendental of beauty. The other transcendentals of truth, goodness, and unity are also obviously important; and they strengthen one another.

Example: A Seminary Course on the Common Good using Karol Wojtyla's principles in *The Acting Person*

In the 1990's I began teaching *The Acting Person* in a masters level course in a seminar format at a large secular university in Montreal; and later introduced it as one of the final courses in the philosophy program at St. John Vianney Theological Seminary in Denver. The approach attempts to awaken in the student in the course a habit of choosing to act towards the common good of each person in the class and of the class as a whole. I call the seminar itself as 'the laboratory' for the class, and structure it in such a way that constant interactive participation is encouraged and evaluated.

The secular context within which one must teach about conscience today contains many distortions about the real operation of conscience. So it is important to simply teach information about the false views of conscience which draw people away from the truth like a magnet draws a compass away from true north: Quotify from my papers on "Where is our Conscience" in your packet!

> One of the first things that must be taught is that secular culture consistently misleads persons about the true location of conscience in the self. Nietzsche and Hegel imply that the conscience is found primarily in the exercise of **will,** James suggests that it is found when the **imagination** projects the consequences of a future act, Freud argues that it is derived from **memory**, Hume and many contemporary secular feminists argue conscience

> resides in the **feelings or emotions**, while Kant and manualists argue that it is found in universal laws found in the **theoretical reason.** [25]
>
> The second thing that must be taught is that conscience is located in a nexus between the two transcendentals, good and true and at the heart of the unity of the human person. Karol Wojtyla states it this way: "Conscience, as a key element of the self-fulfillment of the personal self, points in a special way to transcendence and, so to speak, lies at its subjective center. Objectively, transcendence is realized in a relation to the truth and to the good as `true'"[26]

A teaching challenge becomes how to awaken university-level students to an experience of actually building community in a class room. In addition to imparting objective information, I also introduced a methodology with respect to the structure and way of participation in the seminar itself. Why did I choose an unusual methodology?

> The Congregation for Catholic Education urges educators to confront the autonomy of secular culture in the classroom by consistently fostering the development of each student and of the whole class. "Today especially one sees a world which clamors for solidarity and yet experiences the rise of new forms of individualism. Society can note from the Catholic school that it is possible to create true communities out of a common effort for the common good."[27]

In an article on the transcendentals called "Catholic Philosophy Engages with Secular Education: I described different methods that teachers can use to integrate the four transcendentals in their classes from elementary school, high school, undergraduate and graduate education. In speaking of the challenge to integrate an appeal to the common good in an advanced class at the university level, I asked myself:

> Yet what methodology can a teacher use to accomplish such a daunting task? How can he or she foster the capacity within each student to give of self to other members of the class? *Gaudium et spes* encapsulates the meaning of solidarity in the Church as a communion "in which everyone as members one of the other would render mutual service in the measure of the different gifts bestowed on each"(#32). This kind of community is attractive to students of

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[25] For a detailed study of these different theories of conscience see Allen, "Where is Our Conscience?
[26] Karol Wojtyla, *Person and Community* (Peter Lang: New York: 1993), p. 249.
[27] CCE, *The Catholic School*, #62.

> all ages and backgrounds. It fills a genuine desire for friendship. Yet in the teacher, it must have even deeper spiritual roots.[28]

Consecrated religious have been mandated by the Church to especially work for a spirituality of communion,[29] and recent documents have emphasized this obligation with respect to Catholic education. According to the *Congregation for Catholic Education's document on Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools:*

> It is first and foremost necessary to promote a *spirituality of communion* capable of **becoming the educational principle** in the various environments in which the human person is formed.[30]

> This spirituality of communion can permeate a Catholic Institution so that "[t]he educating community, taken as a whole, is thus called to further the objective of a school as a place of complete formation through interpersonal relations."[31]

What *kind* of methodology can be used in higher education to help foster this spirituality of communion?

> One methodology I have found particularly effective for building interpersonal relations both in a graduate course at a large Canadian university and in an undergraduate course in a seminary in the United States is to use Wojtyla's *The Acting Person* as a laboratory for the students to practice building up the common good as they are studying about its personalistic dynamics.[32] Most graduate school classes are small and can be taught on a seminar model. Interaction among students and between students and professor can directly participate in building the common good by fostering the virtue of solidarity. In this seminar, each student presents a 15 minute summary of a preassigned section of the text, all other students then take 5 minutes to write down a response to this presentation; a 20 minute discussion follows based on the written responses and led by the student presenter. The professor intercedes to correct error or amplify arguments. At

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[28] Sister Prudence Allen, "How Catholic Philosophy can engage Secular Culture in Education," *Études maritainiennes - Maritain Studies,* vol XX (2004): 106-146, here 138.
[29] See Sister Mary Prudence Allen, R.S.M., "Communion in Community," in Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, *The Foundations of Religious Life: Revisiting the Vision* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press,2009), Chapter 4; 113-156.
[30] CCE, *Consecrated Persons and Their Mission in Schools*, #15. My emphasis.
[31] CCE, *The Catholic School*, #18.
[32] See Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, chapter seven, "Intersubjectivity by Participation," (Dordrecht: Holland/ Boston, USA: D. Reidel, 1979), 260-300..

> the end of the class, the responses are collected, photocopied with one copy given back to the presenter for integration into the written summary of the presentation and the other copy given to the professor for comment and return to the student. This dynamic continues throughout the entire semester so that each student has the benefit of these multiple responses; and the professor has the opportunity to gently nudge each student towards an increasingly authentic manner of participation in building the common good of the academic seminar. …
>
> Here each student chooses his manner of participation in the intersubjective community of the class itself. Wojtyla concludes that the actual fulfillment of the individual student is directly related to his free decisions and acts in relation to this subjective aim. Will the student engage with others in the class, or does he or she simply conform and use others? Wojtyla argues that "[i]t is impossible to define the common good without simultaneously taking into account the subjective moment, that is, the moment of acting in relation to the acting persons."[33] ….
>
> A key to this process of educating for the common good within a model of philosophical anthropology is to teach about conscience. Wojtyla's *Acting Person* contains several sections on conscience, and he states unequivocally that its proper exercise is essential for the fulfillment of the human person…. How can a teacher educate his or her students about conscience? The Congregation for Catholic Education says that: "[a] teacher can invite the students to examine their own consciences."[34]

In this context and throughout the class, what can be taught

> … is how to consult one's conscience in the generally 'non-threatening' context of an academic course. In a secular culture, a Catholic teacher can help a student form his or her conscience so that it more closely conforms to objective truth with respect to the goal of build the common good by ways he or she directs dialogue in the class. Let me be more specific. Many students may act impulsively in a classroom, interjecting questions or observations constantly, raising questions without forethought, arguing with either the teacher or another student without considering a proper way to enter into opposition, or talking to a neighbor about a topic not related to the subject at hand. Other students may simply sit passively, conforming to what the teacher asks, fearing to risk making a comment or raising a question, and not engaging in the dynamics of the class. These are all examples of what Wojtyla describes as inauthentic and non- participative attitudes in community.[35]

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[33] Wojtyla, *The Acting Person,* 281.
[34] CCE, *Religious Dimension of Education*, #92.
[35] See Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, pp. 293-395.

The classroom provides a safe and consistent environment within which to begin this practical exercise.[36]

How do I invite the students to examine their consciences? In addition to the daily individual initiatives in dialogue and response to the student presentations, half way through the course, after we have completed reading *The Acting Person* and ended up back at Chapter Seven, where we began, I introduce a sheet of paper with questions directly related to both the reading content and the course praxis, and ask the seminarians to take a few minutes to 'self-examine' in silence. Then I open it up for voluntary discussion.

The following is the list of questions for self-evaluation at midterm mark:

1. How well are we participating in the seminar?

A. Am I acting together and cooperating with others? Or do I just take the work of others and use it, i.e., not do the reading but wait for the other to outline the material.

B. Do I follow the personalistic norm with respect to the other students?

1. Am I experiencing being fulfilled through my actions in this class as a philosophy student and a seminarian?
2. Am I gaining more insight into the human person in general and into my own identity as a person?
3. Am I treating other students as ends rather than as means?
   a. Just using the outlines for my own good?
   b. Interacting with other students through their presentations?
   c. Using the outlines as a springboard for coming to know and to love the philosophical thought of our Holy Father?
4. Have I learned each person's name? Minimal relations
5. Have I begun to develop new friendships? Maximal relations

C. Am I working to overcome my tendencies either to

1. Individualism [always wanting to be the one speaking in class]
2. Or totalism [rejecting another student as harmful to the class]?
3. To various forms of non-fulfillment?

D. Am I working to build the common good?

1. Do I choose to sit next to a student I do not know and initiate some conversation?

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[36] Allen, *How Catholic Philosophy*, 144-45.

2. Do I consider how to respond to another student's presentation in writing? Consideration? Truthfulness?
3. Do I choose to follow up with a new student in seeking his good?
4. Do I apply the material learned to our own growth and development?
5. Do I seek to contribute regularly to dialogue both by speaking and by listening carefully?
6. Do I bring new energy into the class?
   a. By changing my position in the room? (Overcoming conformism)
   b. By introducing thoughtful perspectives for discussion (overcoming all non involvement of asking questions before reading or thinking)

2. Is my fellow member of the class becoming my neighbor?

3. Am I growing in my capacity to love?

II. Where do I want to go in the time remaining?

It is not possible in this paper to go through the particular results of organizing a course this way, but after more than fifteen years of using this method I have seen many seminarians change towards one another and towards the subject of philosophy as well.

> In *The Splendor of Truth,* John Paul II clarifies that: "in the practical judgment of conscience, which imposes on the person the obligation to perform a given act, the link between freedom and truth is made manifest. Precisely for this reason, conscience expresses itself in acts of `judgment' which reflect the truth about the good, and not in arbitrary `decisions.'"[37] By each response to an intervention a teacher can direct the student to reflect on whether the judgment truly passed through his or her conscience before being expressed. What were the effects of the choice? Did the student feel more or less fulfilled by his or her act? Only the student can determine the result of this self examination. A Catholic teacher has an obligation to build interpersonal relations where we teach: "Teaching has an extraordinary moral depth and is one of man's most excellent and creative activities, for the teacher does not write on inanimate material, but on the very spirits of human beings.[38]

In just one example, at the end of this past academic term, a seminarian came to my office to say he wanted to share with me something he had not written in his formal

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[37] John Paul II, *The Splendour of Truth* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), #61.
[38] CCE, *Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, #19.

evaluation. Then he proceeded to tell me that this course had been life changing for him. When I asked him in what way, he answered that the realized he had always had a tendency to conformism (in Karol Wojtyla's sense), namely of going along rather than speaking up when he actually disagreed with what was happening or what someone else was saying. To discover both the theory and practice of how a seminarian can disagree with a peer in class or even a professor, as a way to come towards a greater truth was a liberating experience for him. It was a discovery for him of how what Wojtyla calls 'a spirit of opposition' is a requirement for authentic dialogue and participation in a true community. I should add that this student was a very polite and good student. But to hear that the fear of speaking up was an inauthentic way of participating in building a community was a real surprise for him. He had spoken to his formator about this discovery and it has brought him a new freedom. He was very, very grateful for the course.

Learning To Evaluate Past Acts with an Eye to the Future

In paragraph #1of the Second Vatican Council *Declaration on Christian Education (Gravissimum educationis)*, the purpose of education is clearly stated: "For a true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which, as man, he is a member, and in whose obligations, as an adult, he will share.(*GE* #1.1)" Promulgated in 1965 by Pope Paul VI, this document emphasizes that those being educated must be helped by good teachers who know the art and science of teaching, to become responsible for their own lives and to promote the common good.

At this point, the theme of conscience is introduced in the most unusual way, namely through the children and young people who have the "*right* to be motivated to appraise moral values *with a right conscience*, to embrace them with a personal adherence, together with a deeper knowledge and love of God. (*GE*1.3)" Finally, it "exhorts" with emphasis those with authority for education "to see to it that youth is *never deprived of this sacred right* (*GE* #1.3)"

Much of the work of Catholic educators consists in correcting error and encouraging towards virtue. This is probably the most challenging, difficult, and in many respects the most unpleasant activity of forming consciences in our students. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states in the final paragraph of the section on "Formation of Conscience: "We must also examine our conscience before the Lord's Cross. We are assisted by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, aided by the witness or advice of others and guided by the authoritative teaching of the Church."[39]

Again we are reflecting on the formation of conscience in the public arena of Catholic schools, seminaries, and universities, and not in the private arena of the Sacrament of Reconciliation or spiritual direction. Yet in this area we discover the great importance of the complementarity of vocations among lay persons, religious, and priests. Consider the beautiful description of this reality in the 2007 document *Educating Together in Catholic Schools*:

> The shared mission experienced by an educational community of lay and consecrated persons [and ordained clergy], with an active vocational conscience, makes the Catholic school a pedagogical place that favours *vocational pastoral activity*. The very composition of such an educational community of a Catholic school highlights the diversity and complementarity of vocations in the Church, of which it too, is an expression. In this sense, the communitarian dynamics of the formational experience become the horizon

[39] *CCC*, #1785.

> where the student can feel what it means to be a member of the biggest community which is the Church.[40]

Cardinal Stafford's Pastoral Letter on Catholic Education also emphasized the importance of the Pastor collaborating with persons of other vocations. In his words:

> The pastor of a parish is also pastor of its school. I ask pastors to enliven the liturgical life of our schools, and to ensure that students have frequent, regular access to the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. I urge pastors to build even stronger links between school and parish, so that all parish members, not merely parents of school children, take ownership in the school as a shared, community apostolate.[41]

In the everyday experience of teaching, we often discover the importance of keeping clear boundaries separating vocations. For example, I once had a seminarian come into my office and say: "I have a confession to make to you." I stopped him right away, and said, "If it is a confession then you should not make it to me, but to your confessor." He then answered: "I did and my confessor said I should come to you." So then he added: "I slandered you and I am sorry." At that point, I thanked him for coming and said I forgave him, but then he wanted to tell me how he had slandered me. So I stopped him mid-sentence, and said that I did not want to know what he said as it would be information that could stay in the mind and interfere with our relationship as I would be teaching him in my courses for two years. Part of my thinking was a personalist principle that when you forgive someone you give them back their full personhood, but if you hold a person to an act they did, you reduce them to that act and deny them their full personhood. According to Professor Mariano Crespo, of the Department de Filosofia, of the Pontificia Universidad Catolica de Chile, "To forgive my wrongdoer only because this is the way to gain inner peace or to 'heal my soul' shows a somewhat utilitarian view

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[40] Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful*, (September 8, 2007), par. 40.
[41] J. Francis Stafford, *In the Beginning, the Word*, Part Two, no 36.

on forgiveness. By forgiving the wrongdoer, the victim expresses an attitude of authentic goodwill toward the offender as a person. However, the one who forgives does not extend this attitude toward the action the defender performed. We can strongly oppose wrong behavior without opposing wrongdoers as persons."[42]

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In another kind of experience, we sisters noticed a seminarian outside the Cathedral following an ordination, acting in a dangerous way towards someone, by wildly swinging him in circles around his shoulders. Given that there were dozens of seminarians and numerous priests and formators in the vicinity, we did not have the authority to correct him in that public arena, even though it was tempting to do so. Although this seminarian was our student at the time, we had to stay within the boundaries of our own classroom, or other places such as the sacristy where we have the authority to make individual corrections.

In the elementary school collaboration of vocations in making corrections of individual students, often the collaboration operates in a hierarchical fashion. A lay teacher may be the one to make the correction in the classroom first. If the situation is more serious, then he or she will come to the Principal, who is a religious sister, and she will collaborate with the teacher on the correction. If the seriousness increases either in the nature of the act or in the number of students involved, then the Pastor may join the team, and any where along the line where appropriate parents will be invited to join the discussion. When this kind of vocational collaboration is well defined and fully collaborative it provides the best possible arena for conscience formation in a Catholic elementary school.

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[42] See Mariano Crespo, "Forgiveness and its Healing Effects in the Face of Suffering and Death," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 81, issue 4 (Fall 2007): 579-594., Abstract page 1.

Gaudium et spes describes how we make wrong decisions: "Conscience frequently errs from invincible ignorance without losing its dignity. The same cannot be said for a man who cares but little for truth and goodness, or for a conscience which by degrees grows practically sightless as a result of habitual sin."[43] The first task of an educator is to assess whether an act was done out of ignorance or from a bad habit. Perhaps we should even say that the first task precedes this assessment of an individual student, by making sure that wherever possible ignorance will not be the case. In ~~order~~ other words, what is expected should be clearly stated, and in many cases often repeated. For example, plagiarism must be explained at every level of academic work, and its many forms identified at the appropriate level especially taking into consideration the difficult temptations currently related to new technologies. It is best explained in writing as well as orally, so that when a situation arises, the evidence can be clearly produced that the student knew the truth about plagiarism, so ignorance can not be an excuse.

The Program of Priestly Formation describes the goals of human formation of seminarians as follows:

> The human formation of candidates for the priesthood aims to prepare them to be apt instruments of Christ's grace. It does so by fostering the growth of a man who can be described in these ways: …A person of solid moral character *with a finely developed moral conscience, a man open to and capable of conversion:* a man who demonstrates the human virtues of prudence, fortitude, temperance, justice, humility, constancy, sincerity, patience, good manners, truthfulness, and keeping his word.[44]

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[43] *Gaudium et spes*, #16.
[44] USCCB, *Program of Priestly Formation* (fifth edition), par. 76.

Example: Collaboration in an Elementary School among the Principal (Religious), Vice-Principal (Lay woman), Pastor (Diocesan), Teacher (Lay or Religious), and Parents.

Sr. Rita Rae Schneider, the Principal at St. Clare's Catholic School in Edwards Colorado, concluded her article on "The Concept of communion. Central to the identity and educative mission of the catholic school," with the following observation:

> The Catholic school as a *communion* is an ecclesial reality whose identity and teaching vocation are at the very heart of the educational mission entrusted by Christ to His Church. As such, the truly Catholic school can only be regarded as an inestimable gift from and for the Church today and for future generations.[45]

Let us consider some examples for how she works to achieve this communion in the context of guiding her students.

Correction at the junior high level of 7th and 8th graders can be seen in a recent event where students at St. Clare's School 'treated a substitute teacher badly.' The experienced Principal, Sr. Rita Rae Schneider, RSM, called the students from these classes all into the gym and asked them to describe what happened. The students honestly stated the truth about what they did. The principal thanked them for their honesty, but added that she was disappointed in them because they are called to be the leaders in the school. In her words: "That is who you are. What you did there to the substitute teacher is not who you are." She used the correction to draw them deeper into their proper place in the religious family of the school.

In another example, in which a small group of students were exhibiting a pattern of bullying, after a particular incident, Sr. Rita Rae after consulting with the Vice-Principal, Ann Verratti and Pastor, Msgr. Robert Kinkel, called the students together and

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[45] Schneider, "The Concept of Communion," Conclusion, p. 1199.

asked them right there to write down individually what had happened (not letting them have time to speak together before doing so). By comparing the different written accounts the Principal was able to see a clearer picture of the events and various responses related to what had happened. Then she spoke with them either individually or together. The Principal decided to institute a program of *changing bullies into leaders* across the whole upper school. Each quarter a teacher at each grade level could nominate up to three students for a leadership award. Then the leader of the quarter received a leadership pin and had his or her photo put up on a large bulletin board in a hallway in the school, with a description of the ways they lived virtues of respect, reverence, and responsibility as a leader in the school. Little by little bullies began to vie to become identified as leaders, by going out of their way to help individual children in the lower grades, and even in the day care center next door.

Sometimes an individual student, for some reason or other, rebels against or attacks other students or even a teacher in a classroom situation. Cardinal Stafford reflects on how the general cultural climate of rebellion against authority can infect the classroom environment: "The irony is that today, while the public hunger has grown steadily more urgent, and therefore more clearly the will of the majority, our sense of community and our belief in 'the common good,' have eroded. So has mutual respect, even in the classroom."[46] It is important to recognize that 'the common good' which is a foundation stone for all Catholic education, means paying attention to the good of each and every person in a community or classroom and to the group as a whole.

When disruptive behavior happens, and the teacher needs an intervention by the Principal, again we can learn from a model of Sr. Rita Rae Schneider, RSM. In this kind

[46] J. Francis Stafford, *In the Beginning the Word,* Part I, par. 18.

of a situation, she will ask the student who caused the disruption just to describe what happened. Or if more than one person is involved then for each one to write down what happened. Then after understanding the scenario, she will speak with a student individually, thanking him or her for his honesty, and then she will say why the particular acts were wrong (not respecting another student, destroying property that did not belong to him or her, making it impossible for the teacher to teach a class, etc). Finally, she will ask the student. "If you could begin again in the situation, how would you act differently?" This allows the student to engage his or her own conscience to make the better choice and thus to learn from the past with an eye to the future.

The student then leaves with a sense of having been reunited with the school family and able to move forward. Again Cardinal Stafford expresses the principle in his pastoral letter: "Virtues are rooted in objective truths about human nature, and truth makes demands. Truth requires us to have a conscience. It binds our behavior. The shared perception of truth, and the rights and duties which flow from it, cement together every community of persons."[47]

Conclusion: New Evangelization in Formation of Conscience in Catholic Education

We have considered the recent call of Pope Benedict and Cardinal Dolan to look at how the new evangelization can affect Catholic education. By selecting the specific topic of formation of conscience in Catholic schools and seminaries, we have considered how formation can help bring the mind in conformity with truth; how formation can help a student to make better choices of will about the means to their end of union with God

[47] J. Francis Stafford, *In the Beginning the Word*, Part One, par 19. See also. "Truth is not something created by human cultures or individuals; it is not relative to the times of subjectively conjured by 'personal conscience.' Truth can not die or change.", par. 27.

and neighbor; and how formators can help students to evaluate past acts with an eye to the future. Several examples were also provided of different concrete ways that those in positions attempt to help form the consciences of their students in public arenas. Drawing upon many significant documents of the Church through out this presentation, I will now end with an application of Cardinal Stafford's words: "… the time is ripe to reaffirm Catholic schools as a powerful instrument for the [new] evangelization of American life and culture."[48]

[48] Stafford, *In the Beginning the Word*, Part Two, par. 15.